DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 181 514 CS 502 787

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TITLE Public Speaking Training: A Study of Longitudinal Effects.
PUB DATE Nov 79
NOTE 12p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Speech Communication Association (65th, San Antonio, TX, November 10-13, 1979)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Behavior Change; Communication Skills; Followup Studies; Listening Skills; *Management Development; Organization; Professional Development; *Program Content; *Program Effectiveness; *Public Speaking; Speech Communication; *Speech Skills; *Workshops
IDENTIFIERS Communication Research

ABSTRACT

Six months after a public speaking workshop was conducted for 15 business executives, the participants were interviewed to determine the longitudinal effects of the training. The interviews were designed to find out which participants reported the greatest behavioral change, whether the training produced any carry-over effects, and what aspects of the training were perceived as most important. Over time, the aspect of training which was seen as most useful and which served as the core of participants' recollections was the material related to outlining and organizing. The training appeared to produce long term effects for improved listening skills and a sensitivity to the organization and arrangement of ideas. The individuals who reported the greatest change were those who had had the least amount of training in public speaking prior to the workshop and those who had not had public speaking training in the preceding ten years. (Author/RL)

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PUBLIC SPEAKING TRAINING
A STUDY OF LONGITUDINAL EFFECTS

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Paper presented to the Applied Communication Division,
Speech Communication Association National Convention,
San Antonio, Texas, November, 1979.

We acknowledge the contributions of Shea Management, Inc.; Lawrence A. Heller, Director of Education, Materials Handling Institute, Inc. and Tony Clark, Vice President - Sales, Control Chief Corporation whose assistance and encouragement made this study possible.

CS502787

Introduction

In designing public speaking training programs for working professionals we as designer/trainers are concerned with some issues which are different from those faced in the typical college classroom. In most college classrooms we strive to achieve course objectives within constraints imposed by a fourteen week schedule, a young adult who may be a reluctant learner, and an institution which requires a formal evaluation procedure. In business, industrial, or governmental contexts, however, we often are confronted with adult learners[1] who are likely to be both highly motivated and highly anxious, a schedule in which three hours may be the maximum time alloted for instruction, and a learning environment where grades are meaningless compared to behavioral change.

In meeting this challenge we may draw insights from two types of relevant literature. The first includes case studies of actual public speaking training programs.[2] The second includes studies which focus on the generic problems associated with designing any training program. The latter body of literature provides a rationale for viewing training as a process incorporating distinct stages and provides techniques for implementing each stage.[3] These two bodies of literature help us design public speaking training programs by: 1) Suggesting what has been done, and 2) Suggesting how it should be done.

A crucial question is yet to be answered. We know little about the longitudinal effects of public speaking training. Obviously a participant is likely to have strong feelings about a training program immediately upon its completion. Are these feelings as strong five, six, or seven months after the training? Moreover, if public speaking training does have longitudinal effects what is the nature of these effects?

Overview of Study

The present study assesses the longitudinal effects of a public speaking training program. This study is based upon tracking a group of executives and reporting their perceptions of the effects of a public speaking workshop taken six months earlier. Three specific research questions provide the foundation for the study: 1) What aspects of the training are perceived by the participants as having the greatest utility over time and why? 2) Does public speaking training have carry-over effects to other communication skills? If so what is the nature of the carry over? and 3) Over time which participants report the greatest change?

To answer these questions we first present a brief discussion of the public speaking workshop which provided the basis for the study. We then outline the strategy for collection of longitudinal data. Following this we provide answers to the three questions posed above. We conclude with implications for designing and implementing future public speaking training workshops.

The Workshop

The public speaking training was conducted for fifteen male executives employed by a variety of companies operating within the same industry. The trade association representing the industry served as the contracting agency sponsoring the training.

Workshop participants were selected by their employers on the basis of their job requirements. Individuals who frequently conducted sales or training seminars, or who frequently spoke at trade association meetings were chosen for the workshop. Table 1 summarized the age, backgrounds, and related speech training of the participants. Since the sample size is relatively small (n=15) and since this report follows an anecdotal/case analysis format, Table 1 reports relevant information for each of the participants rather than reporting group means or ranges.

INSERT TABLE 1 HERE

The training was conducted over a two day period and contained three distinct sections: 1) Informal group discussions designed to increase the awareness of participants' strengths and weaknesses as public speakers, 2) Lecture-discussion focusing on strategies for effective public speaking, and 3) Video taping of the presentation and critique of an eight minute speech. This structure was developed based upon a needs assessment conducted with the liason from the trade association.

Prior to the workshop each participant was asked to read a short book[4] on public speaking and to prepare an eight minute speech which could be either informative or persuasive in nature. Participants were instructed to prepare the "kind of speech you are most likely to give in your present job." Participants were told that the speeches and critique would be video-taped to provide an audio-visual record for future reference.

The format and structure outlined above was reflected in six objectives established for the training. These objectives are as follows: Upon completion of the workshop participants would be able to: 1) Articulate their strengths and weaknesses as public speakers, 2) Increase their proficiency in constructing and using visual aids, 3) Critically assess the various types of supporting material which could be used in a speech, 4) Increase their proficiency in organizing speech materials, 5) Improve their speech delivery skills, and 6) Effectively conduct a question and answer period.

Assessment of Effects

The effects of the program were measured in two stages: immediate and longitudianl. A brief discussion will be devoted to immediate effects before we present the analysis of longitudinal effects.

Immediately after the final session of training each participant completed a questionnaire specifically designed for the workshop. The questionnaire followed an open-ended response format and solicited six types of evaluative responses: 1) Perceptions of the quality of instruction, 2) Perceptions of the relevancy/ importance of material discussed, 3) Perceptions of the quality of hand out materials, 4) Perceptions of the extent to which workshop objectives were achieved, 5) Suggestions for improving the workshop, and 6) Over-all impressions of the quality of the workshop. Analyses of responses to the open-ended questions indicated the workshop had achieved its objectives and had been favorably received by the participants.

Longitudinal data were collected six months after the workshop was completed via telephone interviews. An interview guide was developed containing a total of 20 questions spread across five distinct areas. The following are the areas and the information solicited in each:

1) Background data-The approximate number of speeches given since the workshop; the number and type of public speaking workshops attended since the last workshop.

2) The workshop - Evaluative impressions of the workshop, its sturcture, content, and scope.

3) The video tape - The instructional value of the video tape; the number of times it had been played since the workshop.

4) Change - What behavioral changes if any are perceived by the participant as attributable to the workshop? How extensive is the change?

5) Carry over effects - Does the participant perceive the training as having any carry over effects to other communication situations/behaviors?

6) Principles - What 2-3 principles does the participant remember about effective public speaking?

7) Miscellaneous - Any evaluative perceptions not solicited in 1-6 above.

Both authors conducted the telephone interviews dividing the list of participants in half. Interviews lasted approximately 35 minutes.

Longitudinal Effects

Reporting of longitudinal effects will be structured in terms of the six areas presented above.

1) Background data. None of the participants had attended either a company sponsored or privately sponsored public speaking workshop since the one attended six months earlier. When asked to estimate the number of speeches per month they had delivered since the workshop, ten participants reported the same frequency as reported in Table 1, three reported a decrease in speech activity, and one reported an increase. Participants I, C and J reported a decrease; participant E reported an increase.

2) The Workshop. Overall impressions of the workshop did not change drastically over a six month period. Impressions were favorable immediately after the workshop and were favorable six months later. One consistent trend across the sample was the feeling that since the workshop, events occurred which reinforced the material presented at the workshop. When asked if they ever referred to the handouts used in the workshop only two (individuals B and H) indicated that they had. Participants were unanimous in stating that the workshop was a valuable experience.

3) The Video-Tape. Not a single individual had played back the video tape. When this "surprising" finding was probed participants offered the following explanations: "I haven't had the time;" "I know what's on the tape; I didn't want to see it again;" "I keep forgetting to schedule the play back equipment;" "If I play it back on the company machine other people will want to see it and I'd prefer they didn't." Although none of the participants used the video tape all felt that being taped was a valuable experience. The general reaction in this regard was that the video taping situation presented a challenge which had to be met and overcome.

Since the critique sessions were also on the video tape, participants did not refer back to this potentially valuable part of the workshop. However, written critique sheets were also used during the critique sessions and were prepared by all participants. These sheets were used by seminar participants in the six months following the workshop. Nine participants reported that they carefully studied the critique sheets before giving speeches.

4) Change. Each particpant was asked to picture in his mind a continuum indicating change. This continuum was a five point scale with 1 representing minimum change, 5 representing maximum change, and 3 representing the mid-point or moderate change. With this continuum in mind respondents were asked to select a number on the scale which best represented the extent to which their public speaking skills had changed as a function of the workshop. Table 2 presents each participant's response to this item along with that person's assessment of the nature and scope of change.

INSERT TABLE 2 HERE

As indicated in Table 2 five participants rated themselves as "4" or better on the change scale and one participant characterized his change as "maximum" (5). When Table 2 is compared with Table 1 we are able to derive common elements characteristic of the participant reporting significant change. The individual who reported the most change is the individual who either never had public speaking training or who has not had the training in the last ten years.

The anecdotal data representing the nature of change suggests a fairly clear trend. Most of the participants felt they were now able to organize materials more efficiently. The statements emphasize the ability to pace, limit, arrange, and adapt material to a given speaking situation.

5) Carry Over Effects. Although the workshop focused on delivering speeches, most of the participants felt that the major carry over effect was an increased ability to critically listen to speeches. Participants felt that they now knew what to listen for and what criteria to apply when judging the quality of a speech. Two of the participants indicated that the increased skill in listening also carried over to the interviewing and small group context.

6) Principles. What were the most important principles which the participants were able to recall six months after the workshop? The answer to this question closely parallels the anecdotal data presented in Table 2. Each participant felt organization was crucial for an effective speech. The following verbatim statements reflect in detail this general principle:

> A speech should start with an outline that shows relationships among major and minor points.
>
> Organizing gives you structure. Without structure you aren't saying anything.
>
> Logical organization is the key of an effective speech.

The participant's formation and/or recollection of a speech communication principle was also derived through an indirect procedure. Each participant was asked 1) To define the concept "effective speech" and 2) To indicate the criteria which should be used to judge the quality of a speech. The answer to both questions reflected a strong pragmatic orientation. This group of executives felt that a "good speech" was one which got the point across. Thus the criteria for judging "effectiveness" were a logical extension of this pragmatism: Did the speaker do what he intended to do? This group was not concerned with what the speech sounded like; they were concerned with what the speech did.

7) Miscellaneous. The participants felt that the telephone interview covered the major issues related to the workshop. No salient issues were raised by this section of the interview.

Summary of Longitudinal Effects

In the Introduction to this study we posed three questions which served as the focus for our analysis. Our answers to these questions are as follows:

1. Over time (six months) the aspect of training which was perceived as having the greatest utility and which served as the core of participants' recollections was the material related to outlining/organizing. It should be noted that the material related to organizing was only one of six objectives established for the workshop. When asked to explain why this aspect of the training was perceived as most important, participants responded that organization is the key to the success of a speech.

2. The training appeared to have direct carry-over effects for this group of executives. Based upon self-reports the effects appear to be in the area of improved listening skills and a sensitivity to organization/arrangement of ideas.

3. The individuals who reported the greatest change were those individuals who had the least amount of public speaking training prior to taking the workshop or who had not had public speaking training in the preceeding ten years.

Implications

In this section we will discuss implications suggested by the longitudinal analysis. The order in which the implications are presented is not intended to convey a sense of relative importance. All of the implications are viewed as potentially valuable for future designers of public speaking training courses.

1. After six months none of the participants played back the video tapes of their speech and critique session. Moreover, none of the participants indicated a strong desire to do so. Thus, for public speaking workshops the act of video taping may be more valuable than the video tape itself.

2. Workshops which require participants to critique one another along formally developed criteria appear to have significant long lasting effects. Six months after the workshop participants were able to recall both critiquing other speakers and being critiqued. The critique sheets themselves were referred to more often than any other written material used in the workshop.

3. Teaching people how to construct speeches may indirectly teach them how to listen to speeches. The present study suggests this relationship. If this relationship holds true, then possibly we might consider designing training programs on the basis of teaching people people how to listen to speeches. If one knows what to listen for would it not follow that he/she would include such material in his own speech?

4. Training programs must be designed for a specific target group. Our group consisted of high ranking, "middle aged", male executives. They had been in the business world a number of years and had considerable experience at the podium. This experience and maturity may have accounted for their focusing on organization as the most important thing learned in the workshop. Perhaps a less sophisticated group would have focused on increased self awareness or increased confidence. The executives apparently remembered those principles which were most important for them. When designing communication training we must recognize that selective perception and retention will necessarily distort the "importance" of material presented. Ultimately this means an increased effort during the needs analysis stage of program design.

5. If the training had impact people will remember it. Although one might argue that six months is not that long a period to assess longitudinal affects it must be remembered that it is long enough for an infinite number of events to obscure, obliterate, dull, and dilute the potential affects of the training. Our sample of executives had few problems recalling the workshop, its content, and scope.

Notes

1. For a discussion of adult learning and the adult learner, see: Paul Bergevin, A Philosophy for Adult Education, Seabury Press, New York, 1967; Harold J. Alford, Continuing Education in Action, John Wiley, New York, 1968; L. Bisehof, Adult Psychology, New York, Harper and Row, 1976.

2. For example, see: John Bittner, Communication Efforts of the Indiana State Police Public Information Division: A Study of Police Image, Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, Purdue University, 1972; A. Tressider, "Public Speaking in the Seagram Plan," Quarterly Journal of Speech, 32, 1946, 509-511, John Irwin, and Herman Brouchans, "The Teletalk Project: A Study of the Affectiveness of Two Public Relations Speeches, " Speech Monographs, 30, 1963, 359-368.

3. For example, see: B. Bass and J. Vaughn, Training in Industry: The Management of Learning, Belmont Calif.; Wadsworth Publishing, 1966; M. Warren, "Training For Results: A Systems Approach to the Development of Human Resources in Industry, Reading, Mass, Addison-Wesley, 1969; John R. Hinrichs, "Personnel Training," in Marvin D. Dunneve (ed.) Handbook of Industrial and Organizational Psychology, Rand McNally, 1976, New York, Gerald Goldhaber, Organizational Communication, Wm. C. Brown, Dubuque, Iowa, 1979, 2nd. ed.

4. John Hasling, The Audience, The Message, The Speaker, McGraw Hill, New York, 1976. This book was selected because it was short, easily read, fairly comprehensive, and pragmatic in scope.

TABLE 1. Characteristics of Workshop Participants

CASE/TITLE	AGE	COLLEGE DEGREE?	GRAD DEGREE?	HIGH SCHOOL SPEECH COURSE?	COLLEGE SPEECH COURSE?	COMPANY SPONSORED SPEECH COURSE?	DALE CARNEGIE?	MOST RECENT SPEECH COURSE?	SPEECHES DELIVERED PER MONTH
A. Vice President	35	yes	no	yes	no	yes	no	10 years	15
B. Sales Engineer	38	yes	no	no	no	no	no	never	3-4
C. Sales Manager	41	yes	no	yes	yes	no	no	18 years	8-10
D. V.P. Marketing	35	yes	no	yes	no	no	no	20 years	3-4
E. Training Mgr.	42	yes	no	no	yes	no	no	24 years	4
F. Ind. Rel. Mgr.	31	yes	no	yes	yes	no	no	6 years	2
G. Products Mgr.	36	no	no	no	no	no	no	never	*2 per year
H. Service Coord.	35	no	no	no	no	no	no	never	8-10
I. V.P. & Gen Mgr.	53	no	no	no	yes	no	no	10 years	2
J. V.P. Sales	47	no	no	yes	yes	no	no	12 years	25-30
K. V.P. Engr.	41	yes	yes	no	no	no	no	never	3
L. Sales Mgr.	47	no	no	no	no	no	no	never	8-10
M. Sales Mgr.	50	yes	yes	no	yes	no	yes	3 years	5-8
N. Sales Mgr.	41	yes	yes	no	no	no	no	6 years	4
G. Sales Eng. Mgr.	25	yes	no	yes	yes	no	no	2 years	11

*All other subjects reported speeches delivered per month.

Table 2. Participants' Reported Change: Six Months After Training

CASE	EXTENT OF CHANGE	NATURE OF CHANGE
A	4.5	"Feel more comfortable" "Better organized, "Greater self awareness"
B	3.5	"I can boil things down. I make more sense."
C	4	"I now use cards instead of manuscript."
D	4	"I adapt to audiences - less fearful".
E	5	"Dropped the phase "You Know" from speech."
F	2.0	"Use A.V. more effectively"
G	4	"I now organize".
H	3.5	"Now have criteria for judging."
I	3.0	"More efficient organizer."
J	2.5	"My speaking is crisper,more secure"
K	2.5	"I can now pace my speech."
L	2.5	"Able to organize better."
M	3.5	"I can assess quality before I give the speech."
N*	-	-
O	3.0	"I know how to limit ideas."

*This person moved during the sixth month period. Could not be reached.

(Numerical values based on 5 point scale: 1=minimum change
5=maximum change